1. Reply to Sally Sedgwick

Sally pushes me to be clearer about the resources within McDowell and Brandom on the one hand, and Hegel on the other, for replying to the criticism made by opponents of idealism—the criticism that idealism has no way of preserving the basic idea of the independence of the world from our beliefs about it. Call this “the independence problem”. In the book I suggest that McDowell and Brandom each find different resources in Hegel to address contemporary problems in analytic philosophy, and further suggest that this results in each giving somewhat one-sided pictures of Hegel. Here, I’ll suggest that bringing together the different aspects of Hegel that McDowell and Brandom separately focus upon can help us see how Hegel himself addresses the independence problem in a way that is unavailable to either McDowell or Brandom.

1.1. McDowell’s Hegel

Specifically in relation to McDowell, Sally asks how he can have his minimally empiricist cake and eat it too? That is, how can McDowell subscribe to Wilfrid Sellars’s critique of the “Myth of the Given” and yet still consider perceptual experience as offering a genuinely worldly constraint upon thought? McDowell, of course, is aware of the need to address the independence problem, and expresses this in relation to the problems facing Davidsonian coherentism with the image of thought as a “frictionless spinning in a void.”¹ McDowell’s solution is to appeal to an “Hegelian” picture of how perception can rationally constrain thought without the doctrine of the “Given”. He believes that this can be done if one grasps that the content of perception itself has a form capable of allowing that content to enter into justificatory relationships (rather than simply causal ones) with beliefs. That is, perceptual content must be like the content of judgments and beliefs in being propositional: “That things are thus and so is the content of the experience”, he says, “and it can also be the content of a judgment … if the subject decides to take the experience at face value.”²

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² Ibid., 26.
We might think of that step postulating the *conceptual* nature of the context of experience as a *Kantian* step in as much as Kant thinks of experience as shaped by concepts, but alone that will not avoid the problems of coherentism. Thus McDowell takes a further step—a purported Hegelian one—of thinking of this conceptuality as a feature of *the world itself*, not just our subjective representations of it. “But *that things are thus and so* is also, if one is not misled, an aspect of the layout of the world; it is how things are.”  

McDowell describes the second step in terms of the idea of there is no “outer boundary” to the conceptual sphere, and this is meant to mark off Hegel’s idealism from Kant’s. But McDowell now interprets Hegel’s idea of the “conceptually” informed world by means of Wittgenstein’s idea from the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* of the world as a totality of “facts” or “states of affairs”.

Wittgenstein, McDowell believes, can help us see how Hegel’s conception of the relation of mind and world is actually free from the type of contentious metaphysical dimension with which Hegel is usually associated. The trick is to see how it is mistake to think of the mind–world relation as involving some “ontological gap” needing to be bridged between conceptualized thought on the one hand, and an independently conceived a-conceptual world on the other. But there is no gap to be bridged between mind and world because, as McDowell puts it, “when one thinks truly, what one thinks *is* what the case.” I take it that the thought here is that in conceiving the content of thought as being “what is the case” one is excluding a popular alternative—the idea that the content of thought—what one thinks when one thinks—is some *representation* of what is the case. In short, here McDowell picks up on the direct realist’s critique of “representationist” accounts of perception.

That there *is* an ontological “gap” is the assumption behind the representationist’s need to posit some intermediary between mind and world—some “representation” of the world that, being *directly* known, allows the *world itself* to be known by some inferential process. But the direct realist mistrusts the representationist’s initial assumption that the mind can only be initially aware of its own *states*, those states with purportedly representational properties. And here the direct realist can, after all, appeal to our everyday “pre-reflective” assumption that, say, *what* we directly see when we open our eyes *is* the world itself. This is the commonplace given expression in the thought that “when one thinks truly, what one thinks *is* what is the case”.

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3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. This, in general terms, allows McDowell’s views of Hegel to be allied with the recent “non-metaphysical” interpretation of Hegel offered by Robert Pippin in *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
6. Ibid., p. 27. McDowell quotes from Wittgenstein: “When we say, and *mean*, that such-and-such—*is* the case, we—and our meaning—do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but we mean: this-*is* so”. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1951) § 95.
For McDowell, then, Hegel’s philosophical position seems to amount to little more than this commonplace “realist” idea expressed in “high-flown terms”. Giving expression to the idea in this way, one is led to say things like “the world is made up of the sort of thing that one can think”. And while this could be taken as “slighting” or “renouncing the independence of reality”, McDowell wants to deny that there is anything “metaphysically contentious” here. It would be contentious were this relation of mind to world to be considered in one direction only, but “we might just as well take the fact that the sort of thing one can think is the same as the sort of thing that can be the case the other way round,” and, so, one should not look for “a priority in either direction”. Elsewhere, McDowell speaks of Hegel’s conception of the “equipoise” between thought and its subject matter—an equipoise between mind and world.

McDowell’s way of rendering Hegel with this picture is brilliant and tempting. His “equipoise-with-no-directional-priority” idea indeed seems to capture what Hegel discusses in “high-flown terms” when he talks of such things as the “absolute unity of concept and objectivity in the Idea”. Consider, for example, the following account of the “third standpoint on thought”, which I take to be Hegel’s own, in the discussion of the “three standpoints on objectivity” which opens the Encyclopaedia Logic. Hegel there says that “what is asserted from this standpoint is that neither the Idea, as a merely subjective thought, nor a mere being on its own account, is what is true”. Rather, what is asserted is that “the Idea is what is true only as mediated by being, and conversely, that being is what is true only as mediated by the Idea”. If we take “Idea” here to mean something like what McDowell means by “thought” and equivalently “being” as McDowell’s “world”, this looks like just the point that McDowell makes with his “equipoise” picture. Nevertheless, I suggest that McDowell’s picture of Hegel here is misleading, and that this flows from the fact that he runs together this conception of the relation of thought to the world with a discussion of perceptual experience as a type of static “openness to the facts” of the world.

Ultimately, McDowell’s picture of the mind and world with no directional priority or ontological gap, looks more like a version of the picture found in the early Wittgenstein himself towards the end of the Tractatus when he says that “The I occurs in philosophy through the fact that ‘the world is my world’. / The philosophical I is not the man, not the human body or the human soul of which

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7 Ibid, pp. 27–8.
8 Ibid., p. 28.
psychology treats, but the metaphysical subject, the limit—not a part of the world".\textsuperscript{11} This sort of image, I suggest, is just what one gets when one runs together the static and passive features associated with a “snapshot” idea of an individual subject’s perceptual take on the world, together with Hegel’s idea of the relation of thought to the world.\textsuperscript{12} But such a conception of “the subject” as a type of extensionless point of view onto the world looks more like that found earlier in Kant’s conception of the “transcendental unity of apperception” but minus Kant’s distinction between knowable appearance and an unknowable “noumenal” reality.

I suspect that such a picture, even with McDowell’s no-directional-priority gloss, would fail to persuade Sally that the independence of the world was being adequately acknowledged. The no-directional-priority view clearly under-cuts one extreme version of idealism—the kind that sees the world as a type of creation of mind, a little like the view found in the Christian idea of God’s creation of the world \textit{ex nihilo}. But even with that view excluded, McDowell’s “equipoise” view can still look like a version of Platonism that Kant was anxious to rule out as incompatible with our view of ourselves as finite knowers, the anxiety that led to his skeptical strategy of distinguishing appearances from reality. Hegel, of course, rejected Kant’s transcendently skeptical separation of noumena and phenomena, but his alternative, I suggest, is still not one that construes the mind–world relation as a type of transcendental apperception minus transcendental skepticism. What is missing in this picture is the essentially dynamic dimension of the mind found in Hegel, a dimension more properly represented in the work of Brandom.

1.2. Brandom’s Hegel

Rather than the idea of the world as a type of static “totality of facts” laid out for a quasi-perceiving worldless subject, the more pragmatist picture found in Brandom, I believe, captures more of the dynamic picture of the relation of mind to world found in Hegel, and helps give us an idea of how a subject can be a worldly entity.\textsuperscript{13} Brandom portrays Kant and Hegel as anticipating the revolution later brought about by Frege and Wittgenstein, a revolution that undermined the traditional “naming” model of semantics and the associated “subsumption” model of judgment. According to Brandom, Frege’s new way of conceiving of predication, such that the proposition

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  \item \textsuperscript{12} McDowell’s phrase “thinks truly” is significant here, I believe. As we will see, on Brandom’s version of Hegelianism, thinking is a process of inferring, and truth is understood as what is preserved in inference. McDowell’s phrase seems to associate thinking more with judging that inferring.
\end{itemize}
is now considered the most fundamental semantic unit and the name is thought of as having a meaning only in the context of a proposition, had led to an inferentialist approach to semantic content as well as a pragmatist conception of judging as a socially regulated activity.

Hegel in particular, he thinks, caught onto the idea of thinking of a judgment not as the classification of some perceivable particular by a general concept, but as a move in a language game involving the asking for and giving of reasons, a picture found in analytic philosophy in Sellars. The semantic content of a judgment, then, is to be understood in terms of the inferential relations within which that judgment stands. Hegel, he says, “completed the inversion of the traditional order of semantic explanation by beginning with a concept of experience as inferential activity and discussing the making of judgments and the development of concepts entirely in terms of the roles they play in inferential activity”.14 Brandom’s dynamic picture helps get us away from the grip of the “snapshot” model of perception that I see lurking in McDowell. But it also opens him up to the type of objection that McDowell makes of Davidson’s coherentism, the problem McDowell tries to solve with his “minimal empiricism”. And in turn it opens his pragmatism up to Sally’s objection when she worries about what we might call Brandom’s “sociological” conception of normativity—that is, his attempt to ground the normativity of our claims in the social rules of actual epistemic practices.15

In *AP&RHT* I too express worries about Brandom’s ability to do justice to perception within his inferentialist framework,16 and agree with McDowell about the need for some minimally empiricist idea that allows perceptual contents to stand in some justificatory relation to claims made on the basis of perception.17 And there I further follow suggestions that McDowell had given in earlier work on ethics in which he discussed the way perception functions within a more Aristotelian picture of ethical knowledge as phronesis, a context which ties such knowledge to the actions of an embodied subject located in particular worldly circumstances.18 But these elements

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15 Thus she comments: “The genuine normativity of our laws no more follows from the thesis about their social origin than it follows from the thesis that they are implicit in our practices.” P. 7. This worry is akin to that in our judging activity we are, for Brandom, only answerable to others and in no way answerable to the world itself. This conception was embraced by Rorty in his critique of the very notion of answerability to the world.
16 *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*, ch. 2.5.
17 Richard Rorty thinks it a great virtue of Brandom’s *Making It Explicit* that the word “experience” does not appear in the index, but regardless of one’s assessment of the general significance of this fact, it makes it difficult to divine the resources with which Brandom could make sense of those aspects of Hegel which seem to rely on the idea of experience. Thus Brandom treats Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* as predominantly enframed within a philosophy of language.
in the earlier McDowell are, I believe, in tension with the more Sellarsian idea in lecture 2 of *Mind and World*, which allows McDowell to *equate* the contents of perception with the propositional contents of assertions made on the *basis* of perception. And as this is the starting point for Brandom’s inferentialism, they are in tension with Brandom and for his picture of Hegel as well. When we look to Hegel, I suggest, we find different aspects of his approach which cohere with McDowell’s focus on perceptual experience and Brandom’s focus on inferential activity.

1.3. Hegel’s Hegel

In *AP&RHT* I focus on the distinction that Hegel makes in the opening chapters of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* between “Perception” and “the Understanding” as different “shapes of consciousness”, and suggest that these “shapes” can be thought of as differentiated by the logical form of their “contents” with, roughly, Hegel taking perceptual contents to have a broadly Aristotelian logical form—the type of form conferred by a logic of terms—while the contents of the understanding are more properly *propositional*, as understood in the modern, post-Fregean sense. These I relate to a broadly functional difference between *types of reasoning* articulated by such different logics. In general, the distinction I have in mind lines up with that made by Sellars in the essay, “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man”, between the “manifest image” on the one hand, and the “scientific” or “postulational” or “theoretical” image” on the other. In general terms, what Hegel discusses as “Perception” coheres with Sellars’s manifest image, and what he discusses as “the Understanding” with the “scientific” image.

Sellars had been intent to convey the idea that we shouldn’t think of the manifest image as bereft of scientific features: “It is not only disciplined and critical; it also makes use of those aspects of scientific method which might be lumped together under the heading ‘correlational induction’”. This suggests that the manifest image might be accompanied by a distinctive *type* of reasoning—some logically articulated “space of reasons”—that is in some way structured differently to

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20 The idea that perceptual contents should be thought of as “Aristotelian” rather than propositional receives some independent support in the approach of Susanna Siegel who stresses the ineliminability of sortal concepts for perceptual content. See, for example, Susanna Siegel “Which Properties are Represented in Perception?” in T. Gendler Szabo and J. Hawthorne, eds., *Perceptual Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).


22 Ibid., p. 7.

23 Ibid.
that operative in the natural scientific search for general laws. For Sellars, where the manifest image draws the line is in its refusal to postulate “imperceptible entities, and principles pertaining to them, to explain the behaviour of perceptible things”, and this has to do with the need of the manifest image to maintain a type of ontology that contains some basic types of things such as “persons, animals, lower forms of life and merely material things, like rivers and stones”. But, as Sellars points out, “there is an important sense in which the primary objects of the manifest image are persons”.

We might well think that the type of moral psychology of the *phronismos* would require such a conception of reasoning—an idea that appears in McDowell’s own treatment of Aristotle’s practical syllogism in his work in the 80s.

Sellars thinks that traditionally philosophy had been oriented around the manifest view of the world, and this seems right. There is a definite Aristotelian feel to the idea that it is the differences between the essences of persons, animals and stones that means that different explanatory principles will be invoked in the case of each of these different kinds. But the natural sciences developed by effectively giving up any appeal to such essences, and they did this by looking to predictable correlations between observable phenomena and postulating non-perceptible entities as the realities explaining these correlations. For his part, Hegel treats the transition from “perception” to “understanding” in broadly similar ways. While perception deals with conceptually articulated “objects”, the understanding appeals to “posits”, such as “forces” meant to explain changes manifest at the perceptual level.

Brandom helps us to see that the properly propositional structure of our thoughts comes from the fact that such thoughts must be understood as belonging to processes of inferential reasoning, played out in intersubjective patterns of reason-giving—the very sorts of reasoning that can involve postulating theoretical entities to explain phenomenal regularities thus taking us beyond the immediately perceivable world. That is, he helps us see the link between propositional content and the Hegelian “Understanding”. But Sellars’s distinction between the “manifest” and “scientific” images suggests that not all of our account-giving practices take this form: we are likely to give different types of explanations when explaining, for example, why water runs downhill and why I travelled from Sydney to New York. For his part, McDowell rightly resists, I believe, the currently popular tendency to model all philosophical explanation on the types of explanations found in the natural sciences. But his construal of the perceptual world as propositional, I believe, betrays an approach to the logical structure of the world which singles out the natural sciences as a model, an assumption that is deeply built into the discipline of analytic philosophy itself. While resisting the hegemonic claims of “the Understanding”, he

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24 One instance of this could be, for example, the forms of “narrative” explanation that some philosophers of history have opposed to the “covering law” model of historical explanation put forward by Carl Hempel in the 1940s.

25 Ibid., p. 9.
nevertheless carries assumptions from this sphere back into that of Hegelian “Perception”. For Hegel, it is important that these are differently structured shapes of consciousness, and Hegel’s appeal to difference here brings out an all-too-often unacknowledged assumption found in analytic philosophy—the assumption that Fregean logic was able to replace traditional Aristotelian logic without loss.  

McDowell appeals to Wittgenstein’s *Tractarian* idea of the world as “everything that is the case” to introduce the Hegelian idea of the relation of mind and world in a way that he takes to be metaphysical uncontentious, but I think Wittgenstein’s idea is neither metaphysically, nor phenomenologically, nor logically, uncontentious. In the opening paragraphs of the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein goes on to expand on the idea of the world as a “totality of facts [Tatsachen], not of things [Dinge]”, and I think we are meant to take this distinction seriously. Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* appeared in the early days of analytic philosophy’s exploration of the consequences of the revolution in logic started by Frege’s *Begriffsschrift* with its radically different way of conceiving of the nature of predication to that found in the Aristotelian tradition. By making Tatsachen the basic units of the world, Wittgenstein was declaring that “objects” should be understood in terms of the way they contributed to the truth value of propositions, and this transition, I suggest, when considered from a Kantian point of view, must imply changes for the meaning of “object”. For Kant, transcendental logic was meant to unravel the conceptual structures presupposed by experience and, as he put it, “the conditions of the possibility of experience in general are at the same time the conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience”. To think of the logical structure of experience differently will be to think of the objects that experience is about differently. In any case, the idea that Tractarian objects were nothing like Aristotelian substances was, in fact, put forward in the 1950s by Copi and others independently of such Kantian considerations. In short, the *Tractatus* gives us a conception of objectivity more suited to the “postulations” of the scientific image than the everyday “perceivable” objects of the manifest image. McDowell has given us good reasons to be skeptical about the monopoly certain kinds of philosophical naturalists have claimed for law-giving explanations typical of the natural sciences, but has failed to grasp how his account of perception is indebted to semantic conceptions which tie his

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26 The assumption that all our judgments have Fregean content is bound up with what Kukla and Lance discuss as the “declarative fallacy” which they perceive as implicit in Brandom’s pragmatics. See Rebecca Kukla and Mark Lance, ‘Yo!’ and Lo!’: The Pragmatic Topography of the Space of Reasons (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 11–12. Although the nature of the critique of Brandom’s pragmatics given there is different to that suggested here, what is common is a suspicion of Brandom’s univocal account of pragmatics and the consequences this has for semantics.  


29 I. M. Copi, “Objects, Properties, and Relations in the Tractatus” Mind, New Series, Vol. 67, No. 266 (Apr., 1958), p. 163. It was the lack of material properties that, for example, accounted for the fact that objects could be named, but not described. Ibid., 164.
account of perception back to such law-giving explanations. Somehow, Hegel’s difference between Perception and the Understanding need to be kept in play.

1.4. The Independence Problem Again

How does all this bear on the independence problem that Sally asks about? In AP&RHT I appeal to a type of explanatory contextualism in ways that are broadly in keeping with the way that Hegel sees different cognitive shapes as ultimately integrated into “reason”. In certain contexts, like the ones involving evaluative judgments that McDowell discusses in his phronetic account of practical judgment, we will use forms of explanation that stick to broadly “Aristotelian” conceptions of objectivity. In others, we will adopt the more Tractarian “factualist” approach to objectivity and think of our judgments as involving regularities within the sensory field, positing underlying non-perceivable entities in the explanation of those regularities. Sometimes, under conditions of dialectical challenge, we will necessarily be drawn into transitions between such different logical forms, with the consequence that contradictions are generated—a consequence, I suggest, that helps explain Hegel’s thought about the necessity of reason’s production of contradiction. But the idea that our thinking continually gets tied up in contradictions when we attempt to grasp comprehensively the world in thought testifies, as Kant recognized, to the finite nature of our thinking. And to acknowledge the finitude of our thought about the world is just to acknowledge the independence of the world from it, since to stress the finite nature of our thought is just to contrast it with an infinite form thinking—that traditionally attributed to an omniscient God—a type of thinking for which the world would not be so independent. Very crudely, Hegel’s response to Kant’s antinomies is refuse to see them as marking a “no-go-zone” for metaphysics. Metaphysics should rather allow itself to get so entangled and then strive to get beyond the particular tangles characterizing its situation at any one time.

In summary, then, this suggests to me that the right place to look for the features of Hegel’s approach that addresses the “independence problem” is to look at the way that he tries to reconcile the different features of his approach that McDowell and Brandom each treat in isolation. We have to look at the way that he deals with the contradictions that arise from working with different conceptions of objectivity, as found in relation to our perceptual experience on the one hand, and our inferential activities on the other. But this implies that we have to address the independence problem in a way that doesn’t give expression to it in terms of the mind’s responsiveness to independent facts. The difficulty here is to find a mind-independent

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30 Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought, ch 7.2. On my reading, the contradictions that philosophical thought must work its way through according to Hegel are effectively those charted by Kant as characterizing the “antinomies” in Critique of Pure Reason. They arise from the different accounts of objectivity implicit in Aristotelian and Fregean logic respectively.
conception of “fact”, and here McDowell seems right: to conceive of the world as a totality of facts is to think of it as made up of “the sort of things that once can think”. “Fact” and “thought” cannot be conceived in isolation from the other. And for his part, Brandom similarly doesn’t have a mind-independent concept of fact as he simply equates “fact” with the content of a true assertion: “Facts are (the contents of) true claims and thoughts”. 31 Sally worries that such a view loses the idea of the independence of the world from thought, and on this I agree, but I suggest that the Hegelian response is not to affirm the independence of facts from the mind but to question the idea of the world as a totality of facts. That is, from a properly Hegelian point of view, to think of the world’s independence from the mind is to stress the plurality of “shapes of consciousness”, their associated different conceptions of objectivity and different forms of accounting for the world, and to stress that the world itself is not fully captured by any particular finite shape.

From this point of view it is the very fact that our attempts to reason about the world in some comprehensive way break apart into and oscillate—in McDowell’s terms, “seesaw”—between various opposed positions that is itself proof enough of our finitude as reasoners and the independence of the world from our reasoning. 32 But this shouldn’t be interpreted skeptically as some “pathway of doubt, or … despair”. 33 The fact that we learn from our mistakes, and that we can reflectively consider and improve upon our attempts to make sense of the world, shows that we are not totally at the mercy of that finitude and can to some degree compensate for it. 34 Hegel could look on this as an indication of a type of “divine” mind working itself through our finite worldly minds in their interaction, but all this seems to amount to is the idea that

31 Brandom, Making It Explicit, p. 333. It is significant here that Brandom appeals to the same passage from Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations that McDowell appeals to in the context of the “no ontological gap” thesis: “When we say, and mean, that such-and-such is the case, we—and our meaning—do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but we mean: this-is-so”. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, § 95.

32 In the Encyclopaedia Logic, Hegel describes “metaphysics” (by which he seems to mean, “dogmatic” or pre-critical metaphysics) as a “naïve way of proceeding, which, being still unconscious of the antithesis of thinking within and against itself, contains the belief that truth is recognized, and what the objects genuinely are is brought before consciousness, through thinking about them”. G. W. F. Hegel, The Encyclopaedia Logic (with the Zusätze): Part of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Züsatze, trans. T. F Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991), § 26. Post-critical metaphysics must grasp such “antithesis of thinking within and against itself”.

33 Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, § 78.

34 Moreover, part of the way we learn from our mistakes will involve adopting a type of naturalistic attitude to ourselves and our endeavours. McDowell suggests that adopting a naturalistic orientation to ourselves that looks to causes of our beliefs will produce “exculpations” rather than the wanted “justifications” (Mind and World, p. 8.), but I don’t think this excludes the naturalistic standpoint from epistemological relevance. Looking to our earlier mistakes and unearthing their causes can be epistemologically salutary since once we become aware of them, we can put ourselves under the norm of avoiding them.
a plurality of communicating finite minds is collectively capable of overcoming the limitations characterizing each of those minds considered separately.  

Finally, one may see the necessity of the seesawing of rational thought for Hegel—the very feature that testifies to the independence of the world—as sitting awkwardly with McDowell’s construal of Hegel as the thinker who shows us how to “dismount” the seesaw. That is, McDowell treats this “intolerable” oscillation entirely negatively, as something that has to be stopped. Hegel, I suggest, is more likely to try to extract something essential about the progress of philosophy or thought more generally by the very act of this seesawing motion. Once more, McDowell’s attraction to Wittgensteinian “quietism” here attests to a static rather than dynamic conception of the mind. For McDowell, it would seem that the mind is at its most rational when it grasps that it can stop. For Hegel, it is at its most rational precisely when it grasps that it can move beyond some particular thought to a better one.  

2. Reply to Sebastian Rand

Sebastian wants me to be clearer on how I think the notion of unity functions in Hegel and how this relates to the role of unity in Kant. In particular, the issue of the type of unity that Hegel gives to syllogisms leads to the particularities of his philosophy of nature and bears upon the issue of how Hegel conceives of the embodiment of our “spiritual” capacities. I’ll try first to say something about Hegel’s relation to Kant with respect to how they both conceive of the “unity” judgments and syllogisms, and from there suggest how Hegel’s particular answers feed into his philosophy of nature. Here too, my answer will involve the issues I have just raised in relation to Sally, but the route through them will be different.

More recently, in trying to develop some of the ideas I introduced in a sketchy way in the last chapters of AP&RHT I have adopted the distinction that Dieter Henrich makes between Platonic “henology” (from the Greek “to hen”, the one) and Aristotelian “ontology”, and perhaps this distinction can be used to address some of Sebastian’s concerns. Henrich describes “unity” as being the most basic concept in

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35 In this sense, Hegel’s divine mind is the analogue of Kant’s infinite mind against which he characterizes the finitude of particular human minds. For Hegel, however, there is no fixed and permanent gap between the finite and the infinite mind as there is for Kant.  
36 McDowell, Mind and World p. 9.  
37 Elsewhere (in “The Apperceptive I and the Empirical Self: Towards a Heterodox Reading of ‘Lordship and Bondage’ in Hegel’s Phenomenology,” Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain 47/48 (2003), 1–16, 3), McDowell speaks of Hegel’s conception of the “equipoise” between thought and its subject matter. For the same reasons, I find the idea of the mind getting things right when it is “poised” the point at which McDowell departs from Hegel. Hegel sees the mind as at its most mind-like, not when “poised” but when moving beyond one thought to a better one.  
38 See, for example, Henrich, Dieter, Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism, ed. David S. Pacini (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 85–6. I have used this to
Plato’s philosophical lexicon, and, in contrast with this, the concept “being” as the most basic in Aristotle’s. But we might perhaps express this point in another way by saying that while Aristotle thinks of “unity” in terms of the unity possessed by things, in his sense of primary substances, Plato does not cash out the idea of unity in this way. For him, unity is a notion irreducible to others.

Such a “henological” conception of unity as irreducible to “ontological” unity is a feature of the Platonic tradition for which, I think, Hegel finds definite uses. Its basic claim is made very clearly by Proclus in his commentary on Plato’s Parmenides, when he denies that “being” can be predicated of “the one”, and this is just the sort of thinking that Hegel praises in the neo-Platonists, despite what he takes to be their shortcomings. When, in the Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel famously criticizes Spinoza’s concept of the divine substance in terms of his own conception of a “substance” that is equally “subject”, it seems clear that what he is opposed to in Spinoza is just this “ontological” conception of the unity of the absolute. In fact, a rival account of unity can already be found in Kant’s discussion of the Transcendental Ideal in the Critique of Pure Reason where he appeals to the distinction the “distributive unity [distributive Einheit]” that is obtained by the

39 Hegel refers to Proclus in this context in his discussion of Plato’s dialectic in the Lectures on the History of Philosophy. “[T]he Neo-platonists, and more especially Proclus, regard the result arrived at in the Parmenides as the true theology, as the true revelation of all the mysteries of the divine essence. And it cannot be regarded as anything else ….” vol II, p. 60 (19.82). Elsewhere, Hegel refers to the “great sagacity” expressed in Proclus’ treatment of the one and its “negations.” “Multiplicity is not taken empirically and then merely abrogated; the negative, as dividing, producing, and active, not merely contains what is privative, but also affirmative determinations.” p. 438 (19.472). In his treatment of “unity” which “goes forth out of itself through the superfluidity of potentiality” which is “actuality,” Proclus, says Hegel, is “quite Aristotelian,” clearly referring to Aristotle’s doctrine of noesis noeseos.

40 Hegel’s link to Proclus was not lost on Ludwig Feuerbach, who labelled him “the German Proclus.” Ludwig Feuerbach, Principles of the Philosophy of the Future, trans. M. H. Vogel, intro. T. H. Wartenberg (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986), p. 47. For an extensive treatment of the relevance of Proclus for Hegel, see Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron, Platon et L’Idéalism Allemand (1770-1930), Paris: Beauchesne, 1979), pp. 267–324, and Beierwaltes, Platonismus und Idealismus, pp. 154–187. While traditionally the proximity of Hegel to neoplatonic thought has usually been taken as evidence of Hegel’s pre-critical metaphysical intentions, this need not be interpreted in such a way.

41 Thus in the Lectures on the History of Philosophy Hegel refers to the “great sagacity” expressed in Proclus’ treatment of the one and its “negations.” “Multiplicity is not taken empirically and then merely abrogated; the negative, as dividing, producing, and active, not merely contains what is privative, but also affirmative determinations” (LHP: vol 2, 438).

42 As Hegel expresses it in the Preface to the Second Edition of the Encyclopaedia Logic, in relation to Spinoza’s God as “determined only as substance, and not as subject and spirit” the distinction here “concerns the determination of the unity [die Bestimmung der Einheit]; the determination is all that matters”. P. 8. Of course just saying this does little to clarify Hegel’s rival account of the absolute as equally “self-othering” subject etc., but one might conjecture that some rival determination of unity is going to play a role in Hegel’s explication of how to think of the absolute.
“use of the understanding in experience” with the “collective unity [collective Einheit] of a whole of experience”.  

Kant thinks the “transcendental illusion” involves a confusion between these two conceptions of unity, in that reason attempts to “unite the manifold of concepts through ideas” on the model of the way “the understanding unites the manifold into an object through concepts” in experience. By “distributive unity” Kant seems to mean the unity that holds among the particularizations or divisions of a concept, for example, the unity of all shades of red under the concept “red”. The illusion, then, results from the conflation of that type of unity with that holding among the properties of some thing—say, the unity of, say, the redness, roundness, heaviness, etc., in this cricket ball.

The illusion is based in a perfectly legitimate activity of reason: that of seeking some higher order concept in attempts to unify our empirical knowledge. One thus tries to ascend the type of “prosyllogistic” tree that Kant describes in the opening sections of the first Critique’s “Transcendental Dialectic”. The error is to think that one can reach the highest concept which will explain all the lower level conceptual claims that can be deduced from that concept, and this results in the idea of a conceptual determination of what exists absolutely, and thinking of this as naming a type of large thing or Aristotelian substance. So for Kant, the fact that the world as a whole cannot be conceived as a “collective unity” does not imply it can simply be conceived as a dis-unity—a plurality. The idea of its unity, albeit given a “regulative” rather than a “constitutive” role, is crucial.

On this issue Kant and Hegel do not seem so far apart. Indeed, Kant’s account of the genesis of the idea of God, as involving the “realization”, “hypostatization” and “personification” of the distributive unity of the world, seems to imply a critique of Spinoza which, in its negative dimension, is much the same as that of Hegel. Clearly Spinoza had stopped short of “personification” of the world as a whole, but in Kant’s eyes his idea of the divine substance still had been illegitimately “realized” and “hypostatized”, that is, he had given to the distributive unity of the empirical world the “collective” unity appropriate to some empirical thing.

But while there is a certain commonality between Kant and Hegel here, I suggest that Hegel regards the confusion Kant diagnoses as going deeper than Kant himself had realized. Kant seems to have supposed that it is obvious that the unity found in an empirical judgment—for example, the judgment about the cricket ball—is obviously of the “collective” sort. It is only when we try to link up these judgments in
inferential processes that we get sucked into the problems of attributing these greater
unities as collective, or ontological. Hegel will contest this, and assert that different,
contradictory, forms of unity can be found at the level of the contents of judgments
themselves.

2.1. The unity of judgments
Kant’s conception of the absolute as having only a distributive unity, I suggest,
reflects Kant’s own idea of the unity of judgments within the “transcendental unity of
apperception”.

With respect to Kant’s “transcendental deduction” of the categories
in the second edition of the Critique of Pure Reason, it is common, following
Henrich, to distinguish two distinct stages of the deduction, although interpreters
divide as to how to characterize these stages. Here, I will broadly follow the account
given by Henry Allison.

In the first stage, Kant addresses the conditions governing the conceptually mediated unity within our discursive judgments, considered for the
moment in abstraction from the particularity of the human conditions of sensory
intuition. In the second stage, as Allison puts it, Kant “attempts to link the categories
(albeit indirectly) to the perception rather than merely the thoughts of objects”.

As will be obvious from my comments on McDowell in my response to Sally Sedgwick,
from the point of view of Hegel’s separation of the objects of “perception” and
“understanding”, one might ask whether Kant is able to maintain a consistent
conception of “object” across this divide.

When the transcendental unity of apperception is considered in relation to the
former task that focuses upon the conditions for objects of discursive thought, Kant
seems to mean to capture something like the unity found among a set of consistent
assertions, a unity that we would think of in terms of truth-functional relations. Thus
it is significant here that he explicitly questions the term-logical conception of
predication in terms of a “relation between two concepts”. Abstracting from the
conception of judgment as a subjective activity “in accordance with the laws of the
reproductive imagination”, Kant claims that “a judgment is nothing other than the

46 Something like this idea had been expressed by G. F. Stout in his “Distributive unity as a
Stout, an early advocate of “trope” theory, suggests that since for finite individuals any “thorough-
going unity of apperception” must be an ideal limit, Kant, “in founding his proof of the validity of the
categories on the thorough-going unity of apperception, is really founding it on the validity of a
regulative idea—the subjective counterpart of the unity of the universe as a regulative idea”. Ibid., p.
13. That is, Stout considers the transcendental unity of apperception just as the (ideal) distributive unity
of the world considered from the subjective point of view—the ideal unity of beliefs about the world.
47 See, Henry Allison, Kant’s Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense, revised
48 Effectively extending from §§ 15–21.
49 Allison, Kant’s Transcendental Idealism, p. 162.
50 B140-1.
way to bring cognitions to the **objective** unity of apperception”.\(^{51}\) Kant seems concerned with what it is *about* judgments that allow them to hang together in the way suggested by the idea of such a transcendental unity, and this must surely be their capacity to be *true* or *false*. From *this* perspective then, Kant’s distributively unified world would seem to be akin to the “factualist” world of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*. Moreover, when we think of the content of any *particular* judgment in this way, that is, in terms of its relations to other judgments within the transcendental unity of apperception, we can be pushed in the direction of the type of holistic “inferentialist” account of the semantic contents of judgment as found in Brandom.\(^{52}\) but *this*, we might think, must have a consequence for the way we conceive the unity of each individual judgment itself.

It is on the basis of *this* understanding of the transcendental unity of apperception that Brandom thinks of Kant as a type of *de facto* inferentialist, for whom the empirical content of a judgment was a function of all the possible inferential relations within which its stands, but, he adds, Kant was nevertheless held back from fully grasping this idea because he *also* held onto a more traditional account of judgment as the subsumption of *perceived* particulars under general concepts. I think Brandom’s diagnosis is correct, and it is this that lends an ambiguity to how Kant conceives of the content of judgment. On the first, inferentialist conception of the content of a judgment, cohering with the conception of the first stage of the “B deduction”, Kant is committed to the idea that the content of the judgment is *propositional* in the modern, Fregean, sense. A judgment thus is an element within the distributive unity that is the unity of the “ideal” world of total experience and knowledge. But on the latter *non-inferentialist* conception of judgment, that more in line with the *second* phase of the B deduction, he is committed to something like an *Aristotelian* conception of the predication, as involving the subsumption of an object, designated by the subject term and categorized as an instance of some kind, under some further *predicate* concept. That is, on the *non-inferentialist* conception of judgment, the *judgment itself* has the unity given by the perceived object that the judgment is about.

Kant seems to believe, as does McDowell after him, that the two stages of the deduction *smoothly link up*. But if, as I have suggested in my response to Sally Sedgwick, the *inferentialist* construal of a judgment comes along with a *categorically different* conception of its “object” (that is, the “object” is now conceived as whatever it is that makes the judgment true, if it is true), then in can no longer be assumed that the “unity” found in the judgment is of the “collective” type.\(^{53}\) It is *this* difference in

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\(^{51}\) B141.  
\(^{52}\) The alternative is to revert to something like logical atomism, the view that opens up the sorts of problems that Sellars was to mine with his critique of the “Myth of the Given”.  
\(^{53}\) To talk of an object as that which makes the judgment true or false is just another way of talking of it in terms of the “distributive unity” of the universals that are true or false of it.
determination of the object involved that Hegel signals with his distinction between “Perception” and “the Understanding” as different “shapes of consciousness”.

2.2. The unity of syllogisms

Sebastian worries about my presentation of Hegel’s account of syllogisms and the way unity functions within them. As he points out, Hegel “moves to secure the explanatory fundamentality of the syllogism in relation to judgment” – this is the inferentialist move that Brandom has taught us to see so clearly – but, Sebastian goes on, “it is hard to see why all of Redding’s emphasis falls on negativity and contradiction here, instead of on the unity made possible by the syllogism”. With this he brings the important issue of how Hegel thinks of the “unity” of syllogisms centre-stage.

I think this is fair comment. In my rather hasty discussions of Hegel’s “syllogisms” in AP&RHT I was mostly concerned to rebut the still common assumption found paradigmatically in Russell that simply because he had employed Aristotle’s term logic Hegel had been committed to the substantialist metaphysics that Russell thought went with it. Russell’s dismissive way of putting this was to refer to Hegel as having a “bowl of jelly” view of the world to which he came to oppose his own “bucket of shot” view. As the “bowl of jelly” view seems to parody just what Hegel is criticising in Spinoza’s account of the universe as “substance” without subjectivity, it seems bizarre to attribute this to Hegel himself. Perhaps Russell could make no sense of Hegel’s alternative view of the type of “pure negativity” that is supposedly found in Aristotle’s “noesis noeseos noesis”, and so thought that Hegel had no coherent alternative to the bowl of jelly view. In AP&RHT I try to make some sense of this bizarre notion of the absolute as “negativity”, and hence the emphasis on “negativity and contradiction” and the inattention to those places where Hegel does treat “syllogisms” as having a positive or “ontological” unity, that is, treats them as a way of modelling the internal structure of complex “things” such as organisms.

Syllogisms for Hegel are not, of course, simply patterns found within subjective thought about the world, they are patterns belonging to the world itself. There is a similarity here to the type of approach to logic found in the neo-

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54 Bertrand Russell, *Portraits from Memory* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956), p. 21. Russell’s own “bucket of shot” view might itself be seen as illegitimately attributing an “ontological” unity to the judgment! That is, Russell had not appreciated the change brought about in the conception of “object” that had accompanied the change in the conception of predication he had championed. In my reply to Sally Sedgwick I have suggested that Wittgenstein had.

55 We might see the subjective side of Hegel’s challenge to a predominantly “ontological” conception of unity as reflected in his refusal to go along with Schelling’s idea of “intellectual intuition”.
Platonists, who were being discussed in German philosophy around the turn of the nineteenth century. The neoplatonic feel of the process in which living nature was conceived as a unity that was dispersed into a plurality of distinct living individuals which, in turn, upon their death “returned” to the primordial unity was far from coincidental, and Hegel makes common use of this type of image. Friedrich Creuzer, who was to be Hegel’s colleague at Heidelberg, had, with his 1805 translation of Enneads III 8, “On nature and on contemplation and the one”, been the first to translate Plotinus into German. This particular Plotinian text interpreted the processes of nature according to the idea of “nous” or intelligence running through nature was central for the development of early idealist philosophies of nature. With this idea, the fact that our thought about worldly processes had a “logic” could be coupled with the idea that such a logic pervaded those processes themselves.

How to think of Hegel’s approach to the philosophy of nature in relation to those of his contemporaries—Schelling in particular—and how to think of the relation of such unities in nature to Hegel’s “geistig” unities, are much contested issues, and I would like to circumvent them as much as possible here. But what I have said about Hegel’s contestation of the “ontological” unity he diagnoses in Spinoza should at least cast doubt upon certain “metaphysical” interpretations of Hegel—one’s that read Hegel as simply following Shelling’s Spinoza-aligned approach.

As Sebastian points out, Hegel thinks that what it is that vitiates a standardly “scientistic” account of nature—think of the type of empiricism establishing a “realm of law” in regularities among sensory givens—has primarily to do with the form of explanation involved. Such accounts typically limit themselves “to the kind of unity captured by the concept or, in some cases, by the judgment, but is not capable of expressing the unity found in the syllogism.” Even on Kant’s account, the giving of scientific explanations depends on a conception of some original unity holding among empirical judgments—a unity captured by the idea of the transcendental unity of apperception or by those necessary regulative “ideas” unifying judgments into syllogisms. As Sebastian puts it: “Thus, except insofar as the content of the natural

56 As John N. Martin has brought out in his work on Neo-platonic logic, Themes in Neoplatonic and Aristotelian Logic: Order, Negation and Abstraction (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), the neo-Platonists in general had construed the Aristotelian hierarchy of substances in an inverse way to that found in Aristotle. If Aristotle’s hierarchy, as set out in Porphyry’s famous “tree”, is to be understood as moving from the concrete particulars at the bottom of the tree to ever more abstract universals as one ascends the tree, then the neo-Platonists think of the particulars at the bottom as abstract, and think of ascent within the tree as movement in the direction of increasing concreteness.

Since Aristotle’s syllogisms are really transformations of such tree-like structures derived from Plato’s method of collection and division, the neo-Platonic approach to logic might stand as a type of model for Hegel’s “objectified” conception of the syllogism. See, for example, the discussion of “life as a process” in Phenomenology of Spirit, ¶ 171.

57 It is significant that Creuzer was also the first to focus upon the “Dionysian” character of such processes, celebrated later in the century by Nietzsche.

sciences itself shows that the scientistic metaphysical form of scientific argumentation is not self-sufficient, but instead depends on syllogistic forms of unity, the natural sciences are not competent to articulate their own content.”

From this point of view, the problem with the type of “scientistic” empiricist account of the world (the type that McDowell characterizes in terms of construing nature as the “realm of law”) is typical of the problem of “reflection” that Hegel associates with “the understanding”: the natural scientist qua natural scientist adopts a stance towards the world as a whole and from that stance certain aspects of the world come into view. For example, regularities can be traced within sensory experience and nature conceived as a “realm of law”. But adopting that initial stance has involved a certain construal or interpretation of the world as a whole (for example, construing the world as a whole as a distributive unity of “facts”), and that is a type of world-interpretation that cannot be simply cashed out in terms of the knowledge of the world that has come about as a consequence of adopting that stance.

The puzzle to be solved now is how Hegel deals with this in relation to the two alternatives offered by Kant on the one hand and Schelling, on the other, as, from his point of view, both seem problematic. Kant had wanted to maintain that the type of unified “world-interpretation” begged by the empiricist approach was ultimately “subjective” rather than real-worldly. It is a framework we finite rational beings must bring to the world in order to have some sort of knowledge of it. In contrast, Schelling’s style of philosophy of nature looked to give a much more realistic reading of such a unified world-interpretation. Thus while Kant thought of conceiving the world in terms of the teleological structures of organic nature as a type of “as-if” mode of thought, for Schelling this testifies to actual conceptual processes running through the world something like the way the Greeks had thought of the natural realm as pervaded by “nous”. Hegel was obviously critical of Kant’s merely “subjectivistic” construal of the “syllogistic” organization of the material world, but were he to go down Schelling’s path, he would seem to be at risk of lapsing into the sort of Spinozistic philosophy of nature with which, I have suggested, he should be at odds.

My suggestion here is along the following lines. One sense in which Hegel was clearly a “realist” about such syllogistic unities—that is, regarding them as real-worldly and not just as some projection of human subjectivity—was in relation to the structures and processes making up ways of human life itself. That is, Hegel was a type of “realist” about “spiritual”, geistig, syllogisms. Here I will try to say why the

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60 I am going to limit myself here to spirit as objective spirit: spirit as objectified in the material world. This (conveniently) leaves out the role of “absolute spirit”, which is far too weighty a topic to broach here, and some handwaving will have to suffice. In short, the view being presupposed is that absolute spirit—the unities of realm of art, religion and philosophy—are primarily unities embodied in representations separable to some degree from the interactions of objective spirit. It is this that gives them a trans-historical significance across different forms of objective spirit. There is no sense in which they should be seen as the denizens of some other world “beyond” the world of objective spirit.
realm of spirit must serve as the *paradigmatic* realm for such “concrete syllogisms”, and then work my way backwards to what could be meant by a *syllogistic* treatment of nature.

2.3. Syllogisms of spirit

In AP&RHT I approach Hegel’s topic of spirit by tracing to Kant, the components or aspects of Hegel’s treatment of spirit in terms recognitive intersubjective interactions. First, following suggestions by Longuenesse, I treat Kant’s taxonomy of judgment forms (categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive) in terms of the roles played by such forms as major premises within distinct forms of *inference* identified as frameworks of distinct strategies of *explanation*. Of these three explanatory strategies, that associated with the “disjunctive” syllogism is distinctive, as it is the form of explanation meant to capture *interaction* between substances, an idea that Kant extends to the interaction among *subjects*.

In his pre-critical work, in which he tried to combine a Leibnizian monadological picture with the idea of *actual* interaction amongst monads, Kant had flirted with a type of naturalistic epistemology in which changes within the representational states of a “mental monad” were to be correlated in law-like ways with that monad’s actual interactions with *physical* monads. Kant’s turn to transcendental idealism was associated with the realization that the *naturalism* of such a picture was incompatible with the *normative* aspects of rational life, and Kant now saw only an *analogical* relation as holding between the types of mechanical interactions holding between physical substances and the normative interactions holding between human subjects. Nevertheless, Kant still saw these processes as formally similar, and in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, still entertained the idea of a community among moral agents governed by the *moral law*, the logical form of which was to be understood as akin to that of natural (causal) necessity.

For Hegel’s part, in his account of syllogisms in his *Logic*, in his treatment of the most developed triad of syllogisms making up the “syllogism of necessity”, he repeats Kant’s triad of syllogisms—the triad of categorical, hypothetical and disjunctive syllogisms. It is also this triad that looks to be that with which Hegel’s taxonomizes the divisions of modern objective spirit in the *Philosophy of Right*, the “categorical” syllogism mapping the intersubjective structure of the family, the “reflective”, that of civil society, and the “disjunctive”, that of the state which has to integrate the other two realms of objective spirit. Hegel’s motivations here are relatively easy to grasp if we employ the idea of the different determinations of unity

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61 Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought, p. 121.
63 Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, p. 58 (AA5.66).
found within each. In general, a type of substantial or “ontological” unity is found in “categorical” syllogism of the family, as here each member grasps itself and recognizes other members as particularisations of the one substantive whole. Significantly, the dynamics of such intersubjective syllogisms are for Hegel the closest to natural processes. In contrast, the “reflective” syllogism displays the type of non-substantial unity I have been calling “henological”. Thus in the “atomistic” realm of civil society centered on economic exchange, each participant regards itself as a “self-sufficient” particular, and as not united in some greater whole with the others with which it deals in its economic transactions. Predictably, the disjunctive syllogism of the state proper is meant to somehow combine aspects of the first two forms, somehow reconciling the atomistic “bearer of rights” picture of subjectivity operative in civil society with the “identifying as part of a substantial whole” aspects predominant in the family.

When considered in terms of the mode of recognition that holds among the interactants, this syllogistic taxonomy is meant to capture the categorical determination that is dominant and that mediates the others in each of these different realms. Thus in the categorical syllogism the mediating role is played by particularity, in the reflective syllogism by singularity, and in the disjunctive syllogism by universality. In his discussion of the subjects of civil society, Hegel tries to capture the way that an atomistic thinker would attempt to give a type of naturalistic account of, say, modern economic transactions. The typical interactions making up modern civil society have such an appearance as here each treats the other as a mere instrument—effectively, as a merely natural rather than spiritual entity—with which his own desire is to be satisfied. But his own syllogistic account is supposed to show the limitations of such empiricism. The empiricist takes such atomistic determinations as given, and tries to simply explain the actions of each agent in terms of a combination of natural motivations (desire, fear) and a naturalistically conceived form of instrumental reasoning. But this does not help to

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64 Hegel even treats copulation—“körperliche Vereinigung”—as a type of consequence of the “substantial unity [substantieller Einheit]” characterizing the moral [sittlich] attachment. “A further sequel”, he notes, “is community [Gemeinsamkeit] of personal and private interests”. Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences, § 519.

65 One is understood in the sense of a “part” of the whole to which one belongs.

66 Following both Aristotle and Kant, Hegel distinguishes between the determinations of “singularity” and “particularity”. See Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought, pp. Ch 3.2. Very roughly, something is picked out as singular by a non-conceptual determination, like a proper name, while something is picked out as a “particular” when it is picked out as a member of a genus. For Aristotle, “Socrates is wise” would be a singular judgment, “this man is wise” a particular judgment. Kant has no singular concepts, but rather, singularity is the mark of intuitions. For Kant all contentful judgments are either particular or universal, there being no singular judgments, except in the case of aesthetic judgment which is properly non-cognitive. Hegel’s use of the distinction is tricky, but in certain contexts, something grasped as a singular is grasped as a “bare particular”, that is, as freed from some generic concept. Hegel doesn’t treat these determinations as fixed, however. As is clear from his treatment of “sense-certainty” in the Phenomenology of Spirit, such a singular designation (a “this”) passes over into a particular one (a “this such”).
understand how the realm of economic exchange itself is a form of life with a distinct history, and why it is not recognizable in ancient Greece, say. Nor does it help us to understand the relation of this systematically structured form of life to other forms of interaction which do not show to the same extent this individualistic, egoistic motivational structure—the realm of the family, for example, in which motivations such as love are apparently not egoistic.

The type of sittlich or geistig unities found in human life can be thought of as having such “syllogistic” structures actually organized by conceptual relations because the human elements in those systems are fundamentally themselves concept using beings. As actions give expression to the concepts articulating their practical intentions, the relationships among the actions will need to be understood in terms of those concepts. For example, to understand what it is for a person’s actions to constitute an act of selling, I have to know that such acts are conceptually tied to ones of buying, such that each object sold must at the same time be an object bought. To be sure, in their act of selling some good to another, the seller may obviously be acting on a desire (to get something in exchange), be reasoning instrumentally, and so on, as a Hobbesian would deem. But that doesn’t capture what is distinctive about an economic exchange: what is needed for that is an understanding of the concepts embedded in the conceptually related institutionalized actions within which the individual act is realized.

It is in this general way the realm of “ethical” action—Sittlichkeit—must surely be the home turf of Hegel’s syllogistic unities. But what, then, can be the significance of Hegel’s application of syllogistic structures to nature?

2.4. Syllogisms of nature

As Sebastian rightly points out, “nature” for Hegel is the realm of “self-externality”. Nature as a whole is “the Idea in the form of otherness”. “The Idea” might be taken as shorthand for the realm of syllogistically structured spirit—in the case of the “objective spirit” we have been discussing, syllogisms organising types of human life that are themselves embodied in nature. To refer to nature as having the “form of otherness” suggests that nature qua nature is seen as exerting some kind of limitation, or break, on the purely conceptual processes mapped by syllogisms. But exactly what does this imply for the idea of Hegelian syllogisms of nature?

As we have seen, for Kant the universe considered as an absolute whole has a type of syllogistic unity—the “distributive” unity of a totality of facts. But for Kant, this type of unity is tied to the unity of apperception. That is, it is an (ideal) appearance tied to the existence of a “subjective” unity in relation to which it is “for”, and cannot be thought of as “in itself” a unity. Hegel’s syllogistic unities of objective “spirit” are not like this: they are in some sense unities that are “in themselves”, not
because they are conceived as having the unity of a substance (these themselves for Hegel need a subject for whom they are unities), but because they come already equipped with the concept-using “subjects” for whom they can be unities. In Hegel’s jargon, such spiritual unities have existence “in and for” themselves. But syllogistic unities of nature are not like this. More like Kant’s conception of the universe as a whole, they are unities “for” a type of external subject. But this is not some other-worldly subject (like the Christian God), but the type of worldly subjects materialized within the spiritual unities of the world. That is, they only exist as unities for subjects capable of conceptual thought.

We can see evidence for this in Hegel’s discussions of the syllogisms and the types of “objectivity” that belong within such syllogisms in the logic. Thus in The Encyclopaedia Logic it is in his discussion of the “syllogisms of necessity”—the ones that schematize properly “spiritual” complexes—that Hegel points out how a syllogistic structure is not to be thought “as an empty framework that an only be filled up from outside, but objects that are present on their own account”.\(^7\) It is here that “it is subjectivity itself which, being dialectical, breaks through its own barrier, and opens itself up into objectivity by means of syllogism”.\(^8\) In the Science of Logic Hegel describes the syllogism of necessity as “pregnant with content”.\(^9\) The implication seems to be, that in relation to the types of syllogism discussed prior to the “syllogisms of necessity” such externality of content does in fact hold. Nature just is that which is “outside” the syllogisms such that “form” and “content” do not coincide as they do in the spiritual sphere.

We get the same picture of this from the opposite perspective in the following discussions of objectivity.\(^7\) None of the unities involved in the realms of mechanics, chemistry and organic nature are themselves adequate locations for mindedness and self-consciousness—they are not capable of the type of “for-selfness” (because their components are not concept-using); rather, they are as unities reliant upon a type of thought coming from outside their realms, that is, coming from the realm of spirit rather than nature.

In sum, if we think of Kant’s idealism as an idealism about “form” rather than “matter”, we might say that Hegel is a Kantian idealist about nature. The forms we attribute to it, such as in thinking of an organism as a self-organizing unity, are forms that exist only in relation to thinking, indeed, in relation to a certain type of thinking. He is then neither a Platonic nor Aristotelian “realist” about such form in this sense, as such form is not there “anyway”. The picture is different with the realm of Geist, however. Geistig unities are in some sense objective, and not simply unities that exist

\(^7\) Hegel, Encyclopaedia Logic, § 192 addition.
\(^8\) Ibid.
\(^9\) Hegel, Science of Logic, p. 695.
\(^7\) Hegel, Encyclopaedia Logic, §§ 194–212.
in relation to some thinker who is external to them, in the way that natural unities are. Here, it might be said, that he is not an “idealist” about such forms, but a “realist”. But they can be independent of any external thinker because they come equipped with concept users who are necessarily their parts. So Hegel is an “idealist” about them, after all.  

Hanging on to this thought helps us see how Hegel’s approach to nature, as thematized by Sebastian, fits with Hegel’s solution to the independence problem, thematized by Sally. As we are beings with discursive intellects we have to approach nature “syllogistically”. But this doesn’t mean that nature simply conforms to the forms of thought we bring to it. It answers back, as it were, by the fact that all our thought about it is necessarily drawn into contradictions, contradictions (on my account) which flow from the fact that we necessarily shift between contradictory ways of conceiving of the categorical structure of that which exists.

71 While I can do no more than baldly assert it here, I suggest that Hegel is similarly an idealist about the objectivities of “absolute spirit”—they only exist in relation to thinkers, that is, the ones embodied in objective spirit. This makes Hegel an idealist about nature, objective spirit and absolute spirit—an “absolute idealist”—but understanding the way in which he is an “idealist” about each of these realms, and in particular, about nature, can help us understand how nature is, in an important sense external to spirit.